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Parasites isn't too harsh a word for some people

To the Editor:

I stirred up a bees nest... again. Mr. Clinton Maynard's response bore all of the markings of the recycle tobacco victims rhetoric that the trial lawyers perfected: "They never told us it would hurt us," "Those corporations," and my personal favorite, "We're entitled to compensation."

These same arguments are being refined for the battle over fast food corporate profits that is the next pocket to be mined by the trial lawyers.

My greatest problem with all of that is that it detracts from the plight of the true asbestos victims, people who are honestly affected by exposure, and not by lifestyle choices. The connection between cigarette and adverse health effects is undeniable. The vast majority of those affected, smoked or were subjected to second-hand smoke.

It raises the obvious question, is the asbestos responsible for the illness or the cigarettes? I believe the answer is a little bit of both. So why aren't the victims working to protect our children by making Libby smoke-free town? Because that would require individual effort and sacrifice, they would have to quit smoking.

The trial lawyers lump everyone into a class action so that it is more difficult to define personal responsibility, sheer numbers alone sway a jury. The downside is that those who are truly harmed get mixed in with the parasites for a watered down compensation.

Individuals who have proven themselves to be affected in the past have received substantial compensation based on the merits of their arguments. That may require a needle biopsy of the lung to prove a true diagnosis. The class action settlements will be greatly diminished to pennies on the dollar, but a painless screening is all that is required.

Once the settlement money is gone, those who have real health problems will be forced to seek other means of remedy. Often these alternative remedies come at taxpayer expense.

We as a society do have a responsibility to those who can demonstrate harm by outside influences but that doesn't require us to reward self-destructive behavior. The ultimate result of protecting people from their own folly is to breed a society of fools.

I don't think that parasites is too harsh a word for those who expect to wring their bread from the sweat of another man's brow, that is exactly what a parasite does. As the old saying goes, "The host is always the one to complain about the parasite."

D.C. Orr